

# Meeting Notes – Governor’s Workgroup for SBSLI

**Date:** Monday, December 15, 2025

**Time:** 1– 2 PM

**Meeting Start:** 1:01 PM

**Meeting End:** 2:03 PM

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## Attendance Updates

GODHH managed the ZOOM WEBINAR platform. Workgroup, Advisory members and interpreters were invited as a panelist. All others watched as attendees.

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## In Attendance

### Lead

- **Laura Gyamfi**, Senior Policy Advisor
- **Hannah Dier**, Deputy Legislative Officer

### Workgroup Members

- Leslie Puzio, SBSLI
- Tina Joyner, MDAD
- Megan George
- Tiasha Bera
- William “Bill” Millos
- Jake Whitaker, MHA
- Pamela Ortiz, Judiciary
- Mary Pat Fannon, PSSAM
- Sam Mathias, MABE
- Jason Conrad
- Dave Coyne
- Caitlin Comstock
- Betty Colonomos

### Advisory Members

- Senator Nancy King
- Ethan Sonnestrahl, AAG
- Usherla DeBerry, ODHH

### **Additional Attendee**

- Jennifer Katz, Deputy Legal Counsel, Governor's Office
- Ksenia Boitsova, Court Interpreter Program Administrator
- Tanea Brown, ODHH
- Diamon Halliburton, ODHH

### **Absent**

- Juliana Apfel, SBSLI
- Delegate Heather Bagnall
- Dave Coyne

**Approximately 33 visitors were present as observers.**

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## **Meeting Summary**

Laura opened the meeting by checking in on renaming Mary Pat Fannon to Pamela Ortiz. She also thanked everyone for their time and the significant effort with this workgroup with Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act (HB260 - <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/bills/hb/hb0260t.pdf>). The initial focus was on establishing clear meeting logistics to ensure smooth and efficient discussions.

We are seeking to bring the legislation to reality. We are making sure that the workgroup members are understanding the process and purpose of the meetings.

This is an informal workgroup. We want to feel comfortable with the process. We are now seeking to identify the issues with the legislation, moving from legislation to paper to be implemented to date. This workgroup is bringing the conversation together. We are committed to going forward. We do not want this to be an overhaul legislation. Move to consensus basics.

The purpose of the workgroup is to make sure that we have a licensure system functional and operational, this will not change. The makeup of the workgroup will continue to be monitored and managed by leaders, Laura and Hannah. Workgroup has been set and established. We know you want to strike a balance but as mentioned in the beginning a lot happened in the middle of legislation and implementation that balanced the need of the community input but also folks that took on implementing were very specific to education, judicial, and hospital settings that were behind the workgroup membership. The meetings will continue to be open to the public and comments are welcomed. Please feel free to make sure lectures that serve the need for the DDBHH community implementable folks from different settings put forward.

We discussed at the last meeting on Monday, Dec. 8, 2025, potentially doing anonymous voting but making it a public process and transparent, this would mean we will need to be open. The community will have insight with visibility and transparent into the process and into the decisions. We ask that all to feel free to email any questions or concerns. Today, we are not voting on anything.

## **Agenda:**

- Customer Choice
- Licensure Requirement

## **Customer Choice:**

*.08 Consumer Choice. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-vC6\\_JQhb5qBDKhWwgMZ8OUttU-gCVX/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-vC6_JQhb5qBDKhWwgMZ8OUttU-gCVX/view) - Regulations – Posted in Google by SBSLI as of 9.02.2025*

*A. Interpreters and agencies shall provide sign language interpreting services via VRI or on-site, in-person interpreting according to the preference of the consumer.*

*B. Prior to accepting a request for services, interpreters and agencies must ask the requester of the services whether the consumer prefers VRI or on-site, in-person interpreting.*

*C. If the requester is requesting one type of service and the consumer prefers the other type; the interpreter or agency shall not provide sign language interpreting services, unless the consumer agrees to accept the services offered.*

*D. In the case of an emergency, interpreters and agencies may provide sign language interpreting services via VRI for up to three (3) hours sixty (60) minutes.*

Customer preferences, State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) did have regulations posted with Division of Service Documents (DSD) from May 16, 2025 – June 16, 2025 and with a 15 day extension from June 16, 2025 – June 30, 2025 for Public Comments.

Customer choice can be challenging in rural areas. To change from Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) 1 hour to up to 3 hours see in the lang from current regulations 08, C. If the requester is requesting one type of service and the consumer prefers the other type, the interpreter or agency shall not provide sign language interpreting services, unless the consumer agrees to accept the services offered. ADA is clear on how to evaluate effective communication. The problem is enforcement. Letter 'C' is a loophole and looks like forcing DDBHH to use VRI.

Important for the deaf community, many hearing people deciding for the DDBHH, we need to stop that right now, we can make decisions for ourselves, do not decide VRI for the DDBHH.

What the providers are doing to share with DDBHH customers about Customer Choice needs to be widely shared/spread. This includes the modalities of services for the DDBHH customers.

When the amended bill is passed, what will happen if we do not have enough interpreters? What is the plan? We need to prepare for emergency dire need and back up use for availability and use of an ASL interpreter. The proposals shared with Hannah and Laura are addressing this concern. This includes the makeup of the board, compliance with possible sanctions dealing with complaints. Are we considering using the DOJ in the complaint process?

Hospitals do their best to honor Customer Choice. They are aware of the range from high-risk situations to minimum as well as length of stays and weekdays vs weekends with interpreter use. VRI may not be enough to support Customer Choice.

Hospitals have staff interpreters scheduled. As backup they have freelance interpreters and interpreters on contract. We know this is not enough.

Interpreters are required to take training to become certified and would qualify to obtain licenses through the OneStop portal. OneStop portal will provide a directory of the ASL interpreters.

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) advised by the Assistant Attorney General (AAG) the following:

.11 Suspension, Revocation, and Fines - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-vC6\\_JQhb5qBDKhWwgMZ8OUttU-gCVX/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-vC6_JQhb5qBDKhWwgMZ8OUttU-gCVX/view)

A. If a licensee or applicant violates any provision in State Government Article, §9-2426, Annotated Code of Maryland, or any provision of §B of this regulation, the Board may initiate disciplinary proceedings to:

- (1) Deny a license to any applicant;
- (2) Reprimand any licensee;
- (3) Suspend a license;
- (4) Summarily suspend a license;
- (5) Revoke a license;
- (6) Require a licensee to attend an educational course or training;
- (7) Impose a fine not to exceed \$500.00 for each violation; or
- (8) Use a restorative justice program in lieu of taking final action on a complaint.

Briefed on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II and III:

ADA Title II (State & Local Governments)

- Who: All state and local government entities (e.g., city halls, schools, police, parks).

- What: Prohibits discrimination in all services, programs, and activities.
- Key Requirements:
  - Equal opportunity to benefit from programs.
  - Effective communication (auxiliary aids/services).
  - Reasonable modifications to policies/practices.
  - Program access in existing facilities.

### ADA Title III (Public Accommodations & Commercial Facilities)

- Who: Private businesses open to the public (restaurants, hotels, theaters, stores) and commercial facilities.
- What: Prohibits discrimination by public accommodations.
- Key Requirements:
  - New construction/alterations must be readily accessible.
  - Removal of architectural barriers in existing facilities when "readily achievable" (easily accomplishable).
  - Effective communication with people with disabilities.

Setting up the law broadly makes more sense.

Customer Choice is best to leave so that the DDBHH would have the flexibility in case they have other disabilities this would be fitting. Setting up the law broadly makes more sense.

ASL Interpreters in rural areas are challenging especially for hospitals. Finding balance on ASL interpreter use would help offset the perception of ignoring or oppressing the DDBHH by hospital administrators (usually charge nurse) delaying the process regarding the DDBHH's request – this happens EVERYDAY. Best to seek ways on how to show/portray the hospitals have put their best foot forward honoring Customer Choice. Who is monitoring this? Who do the hospitals report their data to regarding their services for the DDBHH – where's the TEETH in this process for ASL interpreter requests?

Discussions thus far are related to the regulation, not the statute.

The court has statewide plans that we need to know to clear the law regarding our accommodations. The court has on demand service that can come 24/7 operations. Court commissioners' stress on individuals about public safety. This can happen at any jurisdiction in Maryland. We have scheduled proceedings in multiple agencies or state attorney offices. The statewide system to find interpreters is challenging. We have deaf that stop by merely to complete a form. This is beyond a reasonable accommodation. We

proposed simply to change one word: change Determine to in a subsection B3 Customer Choice; not mandate a specific accommodation, rather continue to use ADA.

In general, the quality of interpreters ranging from recent graduates to many years of service working, we are now seeing a very poor bilingual knowledge and skills for the DDBHH. Some DDBHH prefer English, print or Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) and some do not need an ASL interpreter. The problem lies with how we know that ASL is not a 'one size fit all.' We do also know that it is imperative for ASL Interpreters to have the skills of such as Pidgin Signed English (PSE) which is a blend of ASL and English, Signed Exact English (SEE) which is word for word English system, and variations of Signed English (SE) and Pro-Tactile American Sign Language (PTASL) which will cater to the different communication needs and preferences of the DDBHH community. We are seeing now more ASL Interpreters are not able to serve many clients, they are not skillful enough or unethical or against the certification requirements. Yet there's also a lack of TEETH in overseeing the complaint process and yet the ASL Interpreters continue to work in the field. This is a great overall concern. The reality is it takes time to learn ASL and its language. In summary, we should not be seeking merely an accommodation, warm body. We should value the need for more skilled interpreters and then we would be able to provide the necessary accommodations.

## **Remaining Meeting Procedures**

- Use the *raise hand* function if you wish to speak.
- Wait to be called on before speaking or signing.
- Once called on, allow a moment for spotlighting before beginning.
- After speaking, turn video and audio off to streamline participation.
- Participation during meetings is limited to Workgroup Members.
- Viewers may send comments *after* meetings via email to any workgroup leader or member.
- Because the workgroup has a significant amount of work and limited time, meetings will be highly structured and efficiently paced.

## **Submission of Proposals**

Workgroup members are encouraged to send:

- Proposals
- Ideas
- Comments related to the topic of each meeting

*These should be submitted each Friday before the corresponding Monday meeting. Monday, Dec. 22, 2025, proposal due on Friday, Dec. 18, 2025, by 5pm to Hannah Dier (hannah.dier@maryland.gov), Laura Gyamfi (laura.gyamfi@maryland.gov) and Usherla DeBerry (usherla.deberry@maryland.gov).*

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# Next Meeting

**Date:** *Tentative* Monday, December 22, 2025

**Time:** 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

**Expectation:**

Workgroup Members and interpreters should arrive **5 minutes before** the scheduled start time.

## Agenda for December 22, 2025

1. **Consumer Choice (continue)**
  - Preference
  - In-person vs. remote
  - Emergencies
  
2. **Licensure Requirements**
  - Licensure for in-person vs. remote
  - Application of other licensure credentials
  - Waiver
  - Use of provisional license
  
3. **Specialties**
4. **Board Membership**
5. **Board Meetings**
6. **Reporting Requirements**

Workgroup members and community members are welcome to reach out to leadership offline with additional questions or input.

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Update: Dave Coyne has resigned.